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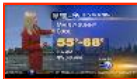
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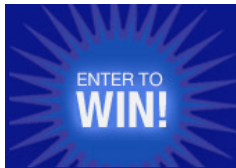
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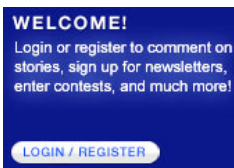
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Local 

Fighting for his country; fighting against Illinois

Wednesday, July 23, 2008 | 11:06 PM

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By Chuck Goudie

(WLS) -- It is a story of fractured families, empty bank accounts and missing money.

When the I-Team received an email from Army Sergeant Joshua Hinkle a few weeks ago, it first caught our attention because it was sent from Camp Bucca in Iraq.

The soldier wrote that he was suffering a great injustice: the state of Illinois, he claimed, had cleaned out his entire bank account for child support.

"They went into my bank account and they took it, they took it down to the penny," said Hinkle, who's with the Illinois National Guard.

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The I-Team spoke with Sergeant Hinkle by a webcam link-up, after he had provided bank records and military pay stubs that seemed to back up his serious allegations.

"The state of Illinois child collection support, child collection agency basically stole \$4,000 from me without any notification or anything for child support they say I owe and I disagree with," Hinkle said.

As you might imagine, the situation is slightly more complex. Hinkle, of the Quad Cities, has been stationed in Basra province for the past seven months. It is his second Iraq tour. Hinkle was first there as a regular army officer when the war began. He has a son, 10-year-old Cody.

"I had a child very young; we were still in high school. And, uh, once I joined active duty, we set up the child support payment system and we've had problems with them ever since," Hinkle said.

And he has a 2-year-old daughter, Scarlett. His children have different mothers.

Hinkle says, and the state agrees, that he kept up with all required child support payments except for a period between assignments in Iraq, when he struggled with employment.

Since being back on the military's payroll as a reservist, full child support, including installments for the missed payments, have been withdrawn from his Army paychecks until June, when the state put a lien on his bank account and took it all.

"I don't know how it is legal. Even if I was at home, how is it legal to take 100 percent of my income?" Hinkle said.

It is legal for the state to take whatever money he makes until it's all paid.

An email sent to Hinkle in Iraq from the Illinois Division of Child Support says, "We show the past due debt to be \$15,291.78, which is a total due for two separate child support cases."

Even though what Hinkle owes in back pay qualifies him for the public list of deadbeat dads, his picture isn't on it. But as the state Web site promises, the child support division will use all available enforcement tools to collect, regardless of whether a person is serving in Iraq.

"In the case of, certainly, this soldier, it sounds like they're not acting in the best interests of the child by financially trying to destroy one of the parents," said Mark Schario, American Coalition for Fathers and Children.

Child support experts say Hinkle and other GIs stationed overseas have no recourse, nor are they protected by laws intended to make sure soldiers do not lose jobs and other benefits while serving.

"I've contacted them on numerous occasions," Hinkle said. "I've emailed them. They emailed me once. Every time I call I'm on hold for approximately 20 to 40 minutes and over here, that is a long time because we have to use phone cards."

"That soldier is serving in Iraq and can't be back here to represent himself that's not by his choice, he's serving his country," Schario said.

"It has definitely made life stressful over here," Hinkle said. "I hate checking my bank account. I hate checking my email. We work 12 hours a day, six days a week. And it has, it's made life really unbearable over here."

There was no comment from the state, citing privacy. They sent a generic statement praising those in the military but noting the importance of paying child support:

"The Department of Healthcare and Family Services has the utmost respect and admiration for those who protect and defend our nation overseas. Illinois state law gives the Department the authority to help parents receive the child support they deserve, and the law provides multiple avenues to help us do that. While we are cognizant of the concerns some may have when forced to pay child support, it is important to remember that the money is going to support their children."

On Wednesday in Iraq, Sergeant Hinkle received an e-mail from the state informing him he now owes more than \$18,000 in back payments and that if he disagrees, he should send them evidence from Iraq.

Most puzzling is what happened to all that money the state seized from his account in June. The boy's mother said she hasn't seen any of it.

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<http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/military/scratext.htm>

ILLINOIS CHILD SUPPORT

<http://www.ilchildsupport.com>

AMERICAN COALITION FOR FATHERS AND CHILDREN

<http://www.acfc.org/site/PageServer>

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